

SMALL GAME SHOOTING IN MYSORE.

BY

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(*With a plate.*)

The Mysore District is the southernmost of the 8 districts which comprise the State and covers some 5,500 square miles of country at an average height of 2,500 feet above sea-level. On the south and west are extensive forests, but the greater portion consists of an undulating and well cultivated plateau with occasional bare stony uplands more or less covered with scrub jungle; while on the north-east large areas are under sugar-cane. The district is well watered by two large rivers and there are many tanks, some channel fed from the irrigation canals, but mostly dependent on the rains of the north-east monsoon. The latter tends to be irregular and in consequence the amount of water in most of the tanks varies from year to year; conditions for sport being most favourable when the monsoon has to a large extent failed and the duck and teal are congregated on the few tanks which do hold a sufficiency of water.

Mysore City, the headquarters of the district, lies some 86 miles by road south of Bangalore and 100 miles north of Ootacamund in the Nilgiris; and a radius of 40 miles from the city covers all the tanks and grounds which form the basis of this article on observations made from 1925 to 1939 and from the records in the game register covering that period.

Most of the numerous State Forests are Game Preserves where no shooting is permitted, so that for all practical purposes sport with the shotgun is confined to pigeons and migratory birds.

Snipe.—As in most parts of the plains of India the snipe is the most abundant and generally distributed of all game birds in the district, and though nowhere sufficiently numerous to lend themselves to record bags there are always sufficient to add variety to the bag and at time to afford by themselves an excellent day's sport. Anything over 25 couple in a day may be considered exceptional, the best recorded being 35½ couple to two guns.

The Pintail Snipe, as usual in South India, is considerably more numerous than the Fantail. It arrives as early as September and leaves about 15th April by which time it has mostly paired, though a few birds may stay on till early May. It is of course a considerably heavier bird than the Fantail averaging over 4 ounces as against the latter's 3¼ ounces. Swinhoe's snipe were found for the first time during the past season, three being brought to bag; and they are therefore even more uncommon than in Malabar where their percentage works out at 1 to 280 Pintails as compared with 1 to 658 in Mysore.

The Fantail snipe generally arrives in October and is very locally distributed. They are on the whole wilder and their flight more erratic than Pintails, and consequently they are harder to bag than their more somnolent cousins.

Jack snipe are distinctly uncommon, but their numbers vary from year to year without any obvious reason, as in Malabar. For snipe shooting the writer has for many years used No. IX shot and finds that the closer pattern gives cleaner kills even at long range than No. 8, while experience shows that in an emergency the smaller size can be used most effectively on teal, always provided that shots are limited to birds approaching or crossing. Those who have not yet tried No. IX are strongly advised to do so.

For the table the snipe is deservedly prized; but how seldom one sees it served except roast on toast! Snipe are also excellent in a pie, or curried, while a thick snipe soup properly made with milk and a little onion is hard to beat; and an excellent potted meat can be made from them. A couple of years back one of our party had the extraordinary experience of finding a felt wad inside the snipe he was eating. One has found wads occasionally in rabbits shot at close quarters when ferretting and heard of them in pheasants and partridges, but the chances against one being found inside such a small bird as a snipe are so great that personally I should have found the incident incredible had I not been present at the table and seen our friend trying to dissect with his knife what he imagined to be an unusually tough 'trail'! The wad I may add is still in my possession.

The following table shows the different varieties of snipe shot during the past fourteen years:—

TABLE OF SNIPE SHOT.

Year	Pintail	Swinhoe	Fantail	Jack
1925-6	30	...	23	3
1926-7	38	...	21	1
1927-8	50	...	31	3
1928-9	46	...	9	1
1929-30	42	...	55	1
1930-1	190	...	49	3
1931-2	295	...	70	7
1932-3	219	...	43	2
1933-4	67	...	4	3
1934-5	129	...	80	6
1935-6	51	...	67	3
1936-7	118	...	71	6
1937-8	364	...	107	10
1938-9	334	3	156	12
Totals ...	1973	3	786	61

The Painted snipe not being a true snipe is not included in the above table, but 43 are recorded as having been bagged during the same period. Though not common, it seems to be fairly widely distributed. A nest with two eggs was found near Gundlupet on 6-8-1935, and several immature birds were shot in the same vicinity on 23-3-1938.

Geese.—The only goose found in the area is the Bar-headed, a considerably smaller bird than the Grey Lag of North India, but every bit as wary and incidentally excellent eating. Though nowhere common it is widely distributed, gaggles varying in number from half a dozen to 150 birds though the latter figure is exceptional. One favourite locality between Gundlupet and Chamrajnagar has afforded unusual opportunities for observation of a gaggle of over 100. Their custom is to assemble at dawn on a bare stony upland where an immense amount of gabbling takes place and the birds presumably secure grit. After about 15 minutes they break up into small parties which proceed in different directions to feed on the adjacent stubbles. About 9 a.m. they re-assemble in larger parties and fly in succession to the tank selected for the day's rest. Usually 1 or 2 scouts are sent ahead and then skein after skein arrives performing as they descend to the water the most amazing aerial acrobatics to the accompaniment of their usual clanging cry. By 9-30 all the parties have coalesced into one gaggle and soon all are floating peacefully asleep (except for the usual lookouts) in the centre of the tank.

Except where they can be stalked on the stubbles from behind bushes or walls, or from the bund of a small tank, they are difficult to approach and seldom allow a suspicious character to come within 150 yards. They can therefore best be brought to bag by studying their lines of flight which seldom vary and taking position accordingly. Bags are necessarily small and in the past 14 years only 28 have been collected, the best day being 8. They are tough birds and B. B. or No. 2 will be found the best size of shot. For cripple stoppers No. 7 does excellently as it gives a close pattern on head and neck; winged birds it may be added are adepts at diving and swimming under water.

Duck and Teal.—Of the *Anatidæ* found in the district only the spotbill duck and the Whistling Teal are resident. All the rest are migratory and their dates of arrival vary to some extent from year to year, doubtless being affected by the amount of water available further North, but chiefly by the date of the setting in of the North-East monsoon current. Generally speaking they do not arrive in any numbers till about the middle of November, after which fresh arrivals may be expected till the end of December. By the middle of March all the duck have gone except for an occasional straggler and the resident Spotbills, but Garganey and Cotton Teal stay for at least another month.

Bags cannot of course compare with those obtained in the more favoured parts of North India and Burma. With us a bag of 100 duck and teal in a day to 4 or 5 guns is distinctly good, and it

is only in exceptional years (such as the season just ended) that this figure will be greatly surpassed, as the following list of red letter days shows:—

- 11 January 1926—24 duck, 15 teal and 6 snipe total 45 to 2 guns.
- 7 March 1935—52 duck and teal (mostly teal) in 2 hours to 1 gun.
- 14 March 1936—141 head including 102 teal and 21 blue rocks to 5 guns.
- 24 February 1939—30 duck and 75 teal (single tank) to 4 guns.
- 19 March 1939—187 head including 9 duck and 143 teal to 5 guns.

In $5\frac{1}{2}$ days shooting during February and March 1939, 712 head were bagged by an average of 5 guns.

What sizes of shot are best? The writer finds that a No. 6 in the right barrel and an Alphamax No. 4 in the left will deal with any shots offered within reasonable range. For exceptionally high shots at duck an Alphamax No. 2 proves useful, and on account of its close pattern No. 8 is recommended for Cotton Teal.

Are duck decreasing in number? As regards Pintail, Garganey and Cotton Teal there does not appear to be any appreciable diminution in the past 14 years, but there is a definite and very noticeable decrease in the number of spotbills. Many of these birds nest in the district and suffer both from out-of-season shooting and also from their eggs being taken for food or sale by the villagers. The following table shows the numbers of duck and teal shot:—

Duck	Year	Pintail	Spotbill	Widgeon	Shoveller	Pochard	Tufted Pochard	White-eye	Brahminy	Gadwall
	1925-6	4	32	...	4	...	...	...	...	...
	1926-7	8	69	4	5	...	...	...	...	...
	1927-8	5	34	1	19	...	...	...	...	1
	1928-9	6	17	13	22	...	...	...	...	...
	1929-30	10	38	2	14	1	...	...	1	...
	1930-1	24	31	...	4	1	2	...	...	...
	1931-2	10	30	...	8	...	...	...	...	...
	1932-3	3	33	...	3	...	...	...	...	...
	1933-4	4	29	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	1934-5	17	34	...	13	4	1	...	...	...
	1935-6	20	32	...	13	...	...	...	...	...
	1936-7	12	37	2	5	2	1	...	...	...
	1937-8	36	89	...	22	7	...	...	...	...
	1938-9	10	60	2	44	22	3	1	...	...
Totals ...		169	565	24	176	37	7	1	1	1

Teal	Year	Common	Garganey	Large Whistling	Lesser Whistling	Cotton
	1915-6	3	23	...	...	10
	1926-7	3	50	...	...	...
	1927-8	1	39	...	3	2
	1928-9	34	21	...	...	...
	1929-30	8	122	1	12	9
	1930-1	4	69	...	5	34
	1931-2	2	61	...	4	75
	1932-3	1	43	...	7	26
	1933-4	...	17	...	...	3
	1934-5	27	114	...	...	64
	1935-6	14	166	...	2	168
	1936-7	11	87	...	19	153
	1937-8	19	152	...	12	285
	1938-9	20	291	...	10	531
	Totals ...	147	1,255	1	74	1,360

Note.—The bags till 1934 were mostly made by 1 or 2 guns, since then the size of the parties has increased to 4 or more guns. The figures given are therefore of interest chiefly as showing the relative proportions of the different species.

The following notes are appended on the various species:—

Pintail.—Large flocks, numbering anything up to 400 visit all the bigger tanks during the cold weather. When they first arrive in November and are still in small flocks they may often be stalked with success, but later on when they have amalgamated into larger flocks (generally of different sexes) no bird is wariier, and if much disturbed, the first shot is sufficient to send them clear away to some quieter spot. As a table bird they rival the Spotbill in excellence early in the season, but their flavour appears to deteriorate later on and is then sometimes rather fishy.

Spotbill.—Though mainly resident their numbers are certainly increased by visitors during the cold weather. A few pairs may be found on most reedy tanks throughout the year and at times flocks numbering 100 and more occur on the larger tanks especially late in the season. Apparently they breed twice in the year, as flappers unable to fly were found in October 1927, small ducklings in January 1931, and flappers again in February 1931—all in different localities. Oviduct eggs were found on 15th October and 24th November.

On the whole they are not very wideawake birds and often offer easy shots, but wounded birds are expert divers and difficult to retrieve especially in lotus covered tanks. They are first class eating.

Widgeon.—An uncommon winter visitor, their numbers varying greatly from year to year; in fact several years may pass without a single one being seen.

Shoveller.—A few birds are generally to be found on most tanks in the cold weather, and at times flocks up to a dozen or more

occur. I do not consider that this bird is a dirty feeder in Mysore, however bad he may be in the North, at any rate as a rule. They are generally found on clean tanks (not on village ponds) and feed on the surface of the water going round in small circles with head down and bill open to skim the surface; often found in company with a few teal.

Provided they are skinned and not plucked they are by no means bad eating.

They are not very wary birds and often give easy shots.

Pochard.—An irregular winter visitor, but by no means as rare as indicated in *Birds of South India*. The largest flock I have seen was estimated by members of our party to number from 300 to 400. This was in January 1938 on a tank near Bannur—on which occasion five were brought to bag and several lost.

Once off the water they generally afford a number of chances as they circle the tank but soon gain height (generally in dense formation) and clear right off.

As a table bird not bad eating, but not to be compared with the Spotbill or Pintail.

Tufted Pochard.—A somewhat rare winter visitor. On one occasion from a flock of 15, 2 were bagged and 3 lost—the others recorded were single birds.

Wounded birds swim fast and low in the water and are such expert divers that they are extremely difficult to retrieve. In flight when seen from below they look like large cotton teal. A poor bird for the table.

White-eye and Gadwall.—Single records.

Brahminy.—Not common. The most seen were 20 on a sand-bank in the Cauvery River. If skinned the breast can be made quite palatable.

Comb duck.—None bagged, but 2 definitely recorded as seen near Gundlupet. Theobald's record of it from Kollegal no doubt refers to the Yellandur tanks in Mysore which I am informed were favourite shooting grounds of his. My recollections of it from Burma are that it was not a good bird for the table.

Common Teal.—Not common and seldom found in flocks of over 20, being more abundant some years than others. An excellent bird for the table, far better in my opinion than the garganey.

Garganey.—The commonest duck in Mysore outnumbering even the Pintails and Cotton Teal, the flocks varying from 25 to 200 or more. Fairly easily brought to bag except when wounded. A good table bird except late in the season when it is inclined to be fishy.

Large Whistling Teal.—Only recorded once when a single bird was obtained from a small flock on the Cubbany River behind the Travellers Bungalow at Nanjangud.

Lesser Whistling Teal.—A common resident generally found on weedy tanks and sometimes on rivers, and fairly distributed throughout the district. Flocks number from under a dozen to 100 or more. On the water they are not particularly wary and may often be stalked; once in the air they circle round and round the tank uttering their noisy whistling cry and keeping at a fair height, but sooner or later

come within range if the gun is well concealed. Wounded birds are expert divers and difficult to recover in the reed and lotus covered tanks which they generally frequent.

I have found their nests on islands in the Cauvery in August, and saw no less than 25 pairs on a tank near Gundlupet in June. Two old birds with 7 ducklings were seen on a roadside tank near Hampapura on 21-12-1932 and I have a record of ducklings from another locality on 13-12-1936. Their breeding season therefore appears variable unless they are double brooded.

If skinned it is quite a fair table bird, and I think I am correct in stating that in Ceylon it is considered better eating than other teal.

Cotton Teal.—Common throughout the district in flocks of from 5 to 200. A few certainly stay throughout the year as I have repeatedly seen as many as 15 pairs in July, but the great majority must be migrants. It is a fairly confiding bird and difficult to rouse from the water, and then at first is inclined to bunch. But when once it is really roused it gives most sporting and difficult shots as its pace is so easily misjudged. A common habit after firing has become general is for a flock to leave the tank, circle across country and then return to the water; as they flash past in this way at breast height they give a wonderfully good imitation of driven grouse and are equally hard to hit. With such a small bird No. 8 shot will be found to give the best results—larger shot often results in a bird being winged and a winged cotton teal is generally lost, as they will stay under water for anything up to 3 minutes.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that these birds are unfit for the table—on the contrary, they are excellent eating.

Demoiselle Crane.—Flocks totalling several thousands visit the Cubbany River above and below Nanjangud annually from about 20th December when they may be heard circling Mysore city at night on arrival, and they stay till March. They feed on the paddy stubbles in the morning and evening, and pass the rest of the day and the night on sand-banks in the river. The only other places where I have seen them is on the Yellandur tanks and at the junction of the Cauvery and Cubbany Rivers at T. Narsipur.

They are not particularly difficult to bring to bag but are tough birds, and large size shot is recommended. Wounded birds are apt to be aggressive and should be approached with caution. Before they leave in March they indulge in extraordinary antics on the sand-banks. Their harsh clanging cry is responsible for their local name of Kara Kara. A first class bird for the table.

Pigeons.—Of other game birds Green Pigeons afford the most sport. They are common and widely distributed during certain months, being found in flocks of up to 50 and more feeding morning and evening on the fruit of the banian trees which line most of the main roads. Their greatest frequency occurs from October to February after which their numbers decrease and from March onwards only a few odd birds are to be seen. The large numbers seen in pairs and presumably nesting during May and June in the Mudumalai forest and at the foot of the Northern slopes of the

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Demoiselle Cranes.



A halt for lunch.

Nilgiris doubtless come from Mysore and return there later. The South Indian green pigeon is commonest, but considerable flocks may be found of the Grey-fronted whose swifter flight and smaller size generally identifies them on the wing. Only 2 Orange-breasted green pigeons have been shot during the past 14 years both near Gundlupet, and on each occasion they were in company with the South Indian species.

They are excellent sporting birds and not difficult to bring to bag, No. 7 shot having been found the most useful size. Up to 40 a day may be expected to 2 guns. For the table they are equally good especially if skinned before cooking.

Of other pigeons the Ceylon Green Imperial occurs in small numbers and the Blue-rock is common. The latter is generally found about old bridges and temples. The Wellesley bridge at Seringapatam is a well-known locality, our best bag being 63 to 3 guns one evening as the birds came in to roost. I have met the Nilgiri wood pigeon only once in this area when 2 were shot out of 4 seen in scrub jungle some 5 miles west of Begur.

Sandgrouse.—Both Common and Painted are found in the district but they are uncommon and strictly local. Personally I know of only one locality where over 100 come to water at a small tank about 9 a.m. in the cold weather, the best bag being 22, but there are other suitable areas which no doubt hold them. I have found their nests in March and April—the average clutch being 2. Only one painted sandgrouse has so far been brought to bag out of a pair found near Nagamangala.

Great Indian Bustard.—As this is a rare bird in all parts of its habitat, a more detailed account of the 3 I have bagged may be of interest. The first occasion was in December 1929 when I was returning across country after shooting a duck tank. Our way was along the slope of a small hill covered with thorn bushes and low scrub, and as we topped a ridge I saw 2 large birds on the ground about 50 yards away, pecking about. They looked like a cross between a vulture and a peacock, and it was not till they took to flight a moment later that I realized what they were. As they had only flown some 200 yards down into a small valley full of bushes I sent my 3 men round to the right to drive them while I ran down to the left to try and intercept their probable line of flight. One came past about 50 yards away and a charge of B. B. brought it down—the other rose well out of shot and we watched its steady flight for over a mile till it disappeared behind a hill. The one shot was a magnificent bird and weighed 25 lb. Its stomach contained some crystal stones and a number of large red grasshoppers, with a brown mush presumably consisting of grass tips; it proved excellent eating. The second was one of those lucky chances which occur to every sportsman at times. It was a chance encounter in 1931 round a bush at only 30 yards, and a charge of No. 6 shot with which I happened to be loaded killed the cock dead on the spot.

On the third and last occasion a year later I visited the same spot, a rolling stony upland covered with short bushes, and after